

THE MYSTERY GAZETTE

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[The Fire Waker-Ben Pastor](#)

The Fire Waker

Ben Pastor

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In 304 C.E. Emperor Diocletian sends his official historian Commander Aelius Spartianus on a diplomatic mission. On the dangerous trek to meet one of the other tetrarch rulers Emperor Constantius, the envoy receives a strange missive while in Belgica Prima province. The note claims Christian healer Agnus THE FIRE WAKER allegedly returned from the dead brick-maker Marcus Lupus; however soon after the miracle occurred, Lupus is found murdered in his bed with no third time reanimation.

Aelius curious by the rumors decides to briefly stop and investigate the Lupus homicide. His inquiry quickly leads him to the killing of Judge Marcellus who led court cases against Christians and a procurement corruption case that ties back brick making. The local Commander and other officials resent the outsider intruding in their affairs while Aelius wonders how high up the corruption scandal truly goes.

Mindful of the John Maddox Roberts' SQXR series though a few centuries into the future, the second Spartianus investigative tale (see THE WATER THIEF) is a superb Ancient Rome whodunit. The story line uses the envoy's sleuthing as a means of providing the audience a deep look at local and regional politics in a period when the once mighty Rome has divided into four rival yet "united" empires. The whodunit is excellent with wonderful twists while the glimpse into the tetrarch as fascinating if

not more so.

Harriet Klausner